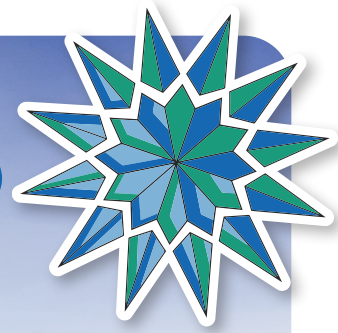


ALL SAINTS

CATHOLIC CHURCH & SCHOOL



Love God • Serve Others • Form Disciples

**September 13 & September 14, 2025;
The Exaltation of the Holy Cross**

Father Eric's Homily

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time – C

Exaltation of the Cross

Numbers 21:4b-9; Philippians 2:6-11; John 3:13-17

What first comes to mind when you hear of the word “cross”? For many, what immediately comes to mind is suffering, pain, agony. By celebrating this feast, the Church wants us to contemplate another aspect of the cross, namely, the glorious aspect.

In the Roman empire, death on the cross was reserved for slaves, rebels, bandits and people who committed serious crimes. According to Cicero, a Roman orator and philosopher, crucifixion was the most cruel and disgusting penalty. It was the most extreme, most cruel and most horrible means of torture. Josephus, the Jewish historian also wrote that, crucifixion was the most pitiable death. In fact, death on the cross was very excruciating and contemptible. People were crucified naked on the cross. It was done publicly to serve as deterrent and warning to all those who wanted to challenge the Roman rule.

The cross was despicable. Why do we exalt the cross if it was despicable. The answer lies in one man, Jesus. Because of Jesus, the cross which was an instrument of condemnation and torture became a tree of love and life. Before Christ, it symbolized cruelty, horror, shame and defeat. However, Christ's death on the cross changed the meaning and symbolism of the cross from horror, contempt, shame and defeat to victory, glory and salvation. So, for us Christians, the cross is not just a symbol of pain and suffering but also a symbol of triumph. St Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:23-24, that the crucified Christ is a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles, but to those who been called (that is those of us who believe in Christ), Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.

In today's first reading, we find that in punishing the Israelites for their complaint against him and Moses, God sent serpents to bite the people and many of them died. In response to Moses' prayer for the people God told him to “make a bronze serpent and mount it on a pole, and if any who have been bitten look at it, they will live.” Moses made a “bronze serpent and mounted it on a pole, and whenever anyone who had been bitten by a serpent looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.” The rabbis explained that it was not the serpent that saved them, but God who healed them. They were not saved because they raised their eyes to the serpent but because they raised

their hearts to God. The book of Wisdom puts it as follows: “For whoever turned to it was saved, not by what he looked at, but by you, the Savior of all” (Wisdom 16:7). This event foreshadowed the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In today’s Gospel, Jesus makes an analogy between his crucifixion and the mounting of the bronze serpent in the desert. He says “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.” What Jesus intends here is that just as the Israelites looked at the lifted bronze serpent and turned their thoughts to God and by believing in God were saved, in the same way, he, Jesus, must be lifted up, so that when people turn their thoughts to him, and believe in him, they will have eternal life.

The verb to lift up is *hupsoun* in Greek. This word is used of Jesus in two senses. It is used of his being lifted up upon the cross (cf. John 8:28; 12-32); and it is also used of his being lifted up into glory at the time of his ascension into heaven (Acts 2:33; 5:31, and in verse 9 of today’s second reading). We therefore see a double lifting in the life of Jesus: lifting on the cross and lifting into glory. These two are inseparably connected. Jesus’ cross was his way to glory. The glory could not have come without the cross; there couldn’t have been Easter Sunday without Good Friday. As the second reading clearly points out, Jesus was greatly exalted because he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even **death on a cross**.

It is the same for us. Our glory is closely connected to the cross. If we reject the cross that come our way as Christians; if we choose an easy way of life, devoid of crosses, we will lose the glory. The truth is that there is no crown without a cross; to win the crown we must bear the crosses that come our way as Christians. We must however bear in mind that not every cross is salvific. Suffering because of our evil deeds or suffering just in the name of suffering is not salvific. Our suffering, pains and sacrifices bear fruit and become salvific when we associate them with that of Christ. God is not interested to see us suffering. He wants to see us happy. He also wants us to love him and serve him. In loving and serving him, we may have to sometimes go through difficulties. These difficulties become our crosses, and when we accept them for the sake of Christ, they lift us up to God.

I would like to conclude with the following words of Fr. Fernando Armellini: “The Crucifix turns our values upside down, and makes it possible for us to turn defeat into victory, service into power, poverty into riches, loss into profit, humiliation into triumph, death into birth. The crucifix should be our standard, our measure to gauge success or failure in life.”

